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## SSC Preparing for Higher Learning Commission's Self-Study Visit

### What is it?

Accreditation is a voluntary peer review process that provides colleges and universities with the impetus to critically evaluate their purposes and whether those purposes are being achieved. Voluntary accreditation ensures quality and institutional improvement.

### Who is responsible?

Seminole State College is accredited by the Higher Learning Commission (HLC) and is a member of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools (NCA).

The Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools is one of six regional agencies that accredits educational institutions in the United States. The North Central region includes Arkansas, Arizona, Colorado, Iowa, Illinois, Indiana, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, North Dakota, Nebraska, Ohio, Oklahoma, New Mexico, South Dakota, Wisconsin, West Virginia, and Wyoming.

### Why is it important?

Accreditation:

- \*Ensures the quality and integrity of SSC's programs and services.
- \*Allows students to transfer credits to other accredited colleges and universities.
- \*Enables students to obtain financial aid and veteran's services.
- \*Allows the college to participate in projects funded by federal grants.
- \*Ensures that the college can recruit and retain quality faculty and staff.



### How does it happen?

Following an initial accreditation, colleges and universities are evaluated every 10 years and/or periodically as necessary. It involves conducting a Self-Study which is now underway at SSC. Following this process, a report is submitted to the HLC identifying strengths and challenges at the College.

SSC then will host a visiting team of peer consultant-evaluators representing the NCA. According to the HLC, these consultant-evaluators have two primary responsibilities: to offer advice to institutions to help them improve the quality of the education they provide, and to evaluate and confirm the quality of an educational institution. The team visit is scheduled for October 26-28, 2009.

The HLC currently offers institutions to choose one of two approaches to seek accreditation. One approach is referred to as the Academic Quality Improvement Program (AQIP). The second approach is called the Program to Evaluate and Advance Quality or PEAQ.

AQIP is a new approach that involves a continuous improvement approach to accreditation on a seven-year cycle. It involves the institution's identification of three projects focused on the five criteria. In addition, three to five institutions would be identified by the NCA to work as a team with the AQIP institution to develop and implement the identified projects.

PEAQ is the more traditional approach with a 10-year cycle of review. It includes the development of a self-study and a site visit. The institution must demonstrate that it is focused on improving its programs and services. It too, has been updated and will require substantially more support data and a greater focus on institutional improvement than in the past.

After an extensive examination by the Accreditation Standing Committee of strengths and weaknesses of these two approaches, the College decided to use the Program to Evaluate and Advance Quality (PEAQ) approach to prepare for the upcoming NCA team visit.

To learn more about the Higher Learning Commission, visit their web site [www.ncahlc.org](http://www.ncahlc.org).